TIME TO GO REGIONAL OR MEGA?

The notion that unified regional governments in Virginia's metropolitan areas might improve our lot has been around for a long time. After all, it is not heretical to assume that economic and political benefits could accrue if we pursued regional governance and consolidated the provision of many public services.

The economic arguments in favor of regionalization focus on a factual reality and a supposition. First, the weight of economic empirical evidence tells us that public services, ranging from water supply to libraries, exhibit significant economies of scale.[1] Large size lowers unit costs and, on occasion, can increase the quality of output as well. Of course, there are always exceptions to the rule and not all public services enjoy economies of scale.

Second, the supposition is that businesses prefer to locate in regions that "have their act together" (the observation of a Virginia corporate executive). Firms and organizations understandably prefer the certainty of dealing with a minimum number of governmental entities. While businesses may not always be thrilled with what these governmental entities do, they know what buttons to push. It is certainly not a stretch to argue that businesses can save money if they don't have to interact with a large number of governmental entities.

In the political realm, deservedly or not, cities and counties in several areas of Virginia have acquired reputations for pushing multiple,

1 Alesch, Daniel J., and L.A. Dougharty. The Feasibility of Economies-of-Scale Analysis of Public Services. Rand, 1971.

competing legislative agendas. The absence of clear regional priorities and direction affects the ability of other state and national representatives to bring home the proverbial legislative bacon. It seems plausible that more might be accomplished if the cities and counties were all rowing in the same direction. Unified regional governmental units arguably might help in not only coordinating legislative action, but also in attracting new businesses and dealing with challenges such as climate change.

The most obvious example of large-scale regional government is New York City, with its more than 8.5 million residents spread across five boroughs. Since 1898, the boroughs have been united in one city government. The consolidation of the boroughs not only created a unifying government, but also allowed each borough to retain some aspects of local authority. The borough-city relationship in New York mirrors the state-national federalism of the United States. Virtually all agree, however, that the borough of Manhattan is primarily a location, and New York City is both a location and the ultimately responsible governmental unit.

It is not a stretch to assert that many of the things we prominently associate with New York City today – the United Nations, numerous Fortune 500 company headquarters and superb cultural attractions, such the Metropolitan Museum of Art – would exist in the metropolitan area only in diminished form, or not at all, if five or more separate cities existed rather than one unified city. Witness the city of Richmond and Henrico and Chesterfield counties, or the seven major cities of Hampton Roads, as they wrestle over matters small and large, including entertainment venues, outlet malls, economic development agencies, vehicle tolls and the like.

At the same time, however, it also is true that New York City simultaneously has developed a reputation for supporting a large, expensive and bureaucratic government. Further, some major infrastructure and institutions do not seem to work well (consider LaGuardia Airport and the subway system). The Big Apple also generates very large levels of economic inequality.[2] It appears that ledgers with respect to regional unification nearly always contain both pluses and minuses.

2 http://www.epi.org/publication/income-inequality-in-the-us.

Virginia Antecedents

Interest in regional government and the consolidation of public services has waxed and waned over the years in Virginia. Appendix A lists some of the successful and unsuccessful annexation attempts by Virginia cities in the last century. Richmond's acquisition of Manchester in 1910, Newport News' addition of Warwick in 1958 and Christiansburg's addition of Cambria in 1964 are among the successful acquisitions. The list of failures is long, however, and includes rejected annexation attempts by Winchester in 1969, Charlottesville in 1970 and Roanoke in 1990.

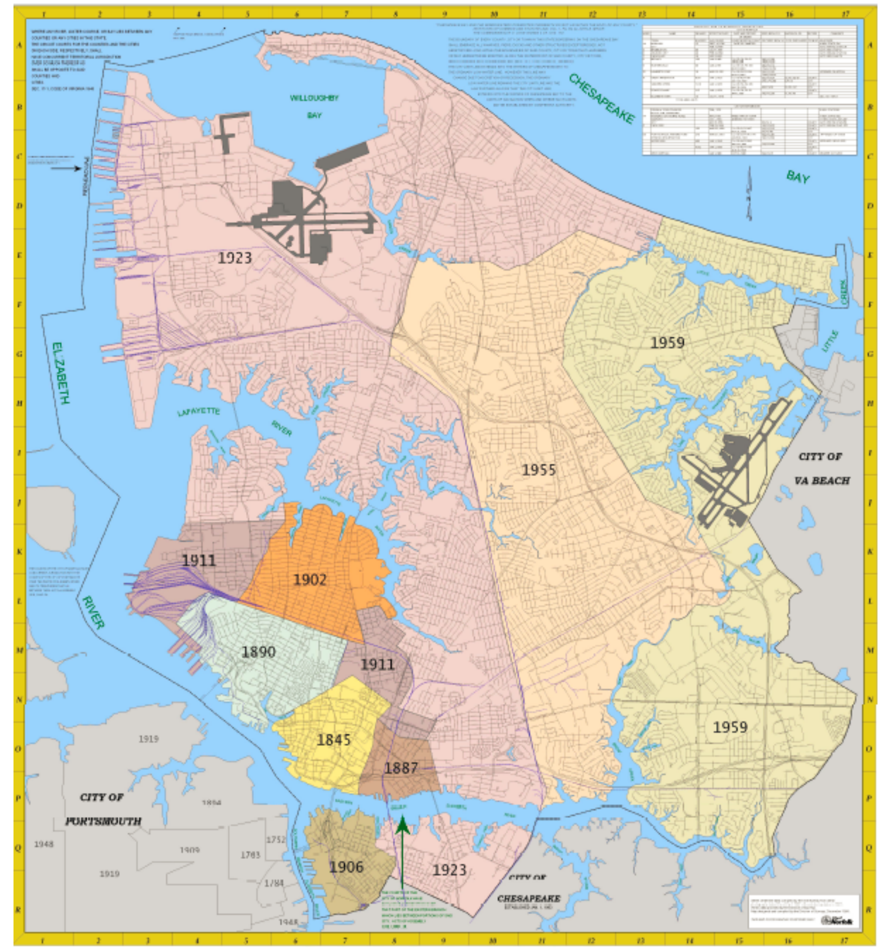
In 1980, the Commonwealth reacted to pressures from those opposed to annexations and approved regulations that permitted counties with larger populations and greater population density to immunize themselves from annexation proposals. Chesterfield, Henrico, Henry, Prince William, Roanoke and York counties immediately benefitted from this legislation. Virginia also granted partial protection to counties that already provided public services similar to those of adjoining cities anxious to annex them. **In 1987, the General Assembly imposed a "temporary" ban on annexations of county lands by cities that remains in effect to this day.**

Since 1980, Virginia law has authorized local circuit courts to grant counties immunity from any annexation by a city if they satisfied certain population and population density requirements: a population of 50,000 and a density of 140 residents per square mile; or, a population of 20,000 and a density of 300 residents per square mile. Practically speaking, these standards virtually eliminate annexations in urban areas.

Each of the preceding developments is consistent with Virginia's status as a Dillon Rule state. The foundation of the Dillon Rule is a distrust of the motivations and competence of local governments. Virginia's Supreme Court adopted the Dillon Rule in 1896 via City of Winchester v. Redmond, and has concluded that local governments in Virginia only have powers that are conferred upon them by the General Assembly, and that these powers must be explicitly defined and related to the core functions of local governments.[3] Figure 1 brings these restrictions to life in the realm of annexations by means of the example of the city of Norfolk. Between 1845 and 1959, Norfolk's physical size expanded as the result of five major annexations, including the areas encompassing the largest naval base in the world and the region's major airport. Annexations halted, however, in 1959 with the creation of the cities of Virginia Beach and Chesapeake and subsequent changes in state laws in the 1970s and 1980s. Norfolk today is an enclosed city for which no opportunities for further annexation exist. The same circumstance effectively applies to other Virginia cities such as Alexandria, Fairfax, Lynchburg, Richmond and Roanoke.

FIGURE 1

**ANNEXATION BY NORFOLK, 1845-1959:
AN EXAMPLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHANGES IN HAMPTON ROADS**



Source: City of Norfolk, Map Gallery

3 Lamb, James C., and Martin P. Burks. "Virginia Reports. Reports of Cases in the Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia." The Virginia Law Register 93 (1897): 711-18. doi:10.2307/1097665.

GO Virginia And Regionalization

Imitating Old Faithful, approximately once per decade in Virginia, interest in regional solutions to governance and service provision rekindles and groups are formed to encourage regional solutions to problems and issues. The current GO Virginia initiative – with its statewide brief – follows in this tradition (http://www.govirginia.org). In 2016, the General Assembly allocated $27 million to GO Virginia to encourage regional collaboration, with a primary focus on making the Commonwealth's regions more attractive to current and prospective businesses.

The emergence of GO Virginia must be considered in the context of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee's widely cited November 2016 report, which eviscerated the performance of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership.[4] This highly critical review of the Partnership's operations generated a set of changes: a new Partnership director, a reorganization and a reduced budget. It also stoked political support for alternatives, such as GO Virginia.

GO Virginia is a more focused approach to economic development that simultaneously spurs regional cooperation. Axiomatically, legislators usually like programs that promise the return of state dollars to their districts, and GO Virginia promises to do just that. Politically, GO Virginia also provided both the executive and legislative branches with a valuable opportunity to stand clear of the documented failures of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership.

Public-spirited efforts with a regional accent, such as GO Virginia, usually attract the support of major corporations, corporate leaders and cognoscenti because they appeal to virtues that many citizens hold dear, such as cooperation, elimination of duplication and the promotion of economic growth. It is not surprising that the consensus view in the Commonwealth is that GO Virginia represents a new, more productive path to travel. The proponents of GO Virginia include nearly every organization of significance in the Commonwealth.

There are other views, however. Less charitable pundits view GO Virginia as a new publicly financed Christmas tree around which ambitious cities, businesses and universities will gather to pluck gifts. Thus, many of Virginia's largest businesses will partner with universities, new firms and governmental units to grab a share of the goodies. Universities will perceive these funds as a viable way to offset the general fund cuts and as a funding source for construction of new research and development facilities. Surely, none of these developments is necessarily a bad thing, but such processes may not result in the highest and best use of the funds.[5]

GO Virginia is governed by a 24-member statewide board that oversees nine regional boards, each of which may submit programmatic and funding proposals to the statewide board. The regions vary substantially in terms of population – about 400,000 to 2.5 million – and do not reflect the geography of already established planning districts. GO Virginia is not a part of the executive branch, but instead reports to the General Assembly. Nor does the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia appear to have any specific authority relating to the activities of public colleges and universities funded by GO Virginia. Yet to be clearly established is who will evaluate GO Virginia performance, or how and when this will occur.

4 Joint Legislative and Review Committee, Management and Accountability of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (November 2016), http://jlarc.virginia.gov/vedp-2016.asp.

5 See the website Bearing Drift, "Stealth Regionalism Quietly Makes Headway on the Coattails of GO Virginia," Part One (May 10, 2017) and Part Two (May 23, 2017), https://bearingdrift.com.

Megaregions?

This United States has been rapidly urbanizing in recent decades. In 2015, the Census Bureau reported that 62.7 percent of all Americans reside in only 3.5 percent of the nation's land area.[6] Most of these inhabitants live in "megaregions," consisting of overlapping metropolitan areas that once were separate and distinct. Witness the expansion of the Baltimore-Washington, D.C., agglomeration, which now stretches south to within 50 miles of Richmond and north to the Delaware border.

Thinking in terms of megaregions, some contend, is entirely rational because these entities are meaningful, interdependent economic units that overlay city, county and state boundaries. Individuals commute to Washington, D.C., from all directions, including West Virginia, Maryland and Virginia. In Chicago, the market for commuters and customers stretches from Wisconsin through Illinois to Indiana. The salient point is that "old" geographic and political boundaries do not constrain economic activity or social intercourse, and megaregions roughly define the most critical economic and social interconnections.

Megaregions are defined by the behavior of workers and customers rather than conventional geographic boundaries.

As Parag Khanna, a global strategist and author, argued in The New York Times ("A New Map for America," April 15, 2016):

> "Increasingly ... socially and economically, America is reorganizing itself around regional infrastructure lines and metropolitan clusters that ignore state and even national borders. ... To an extent, America is already headed toward a metropolis-first arrangement. The states aren't about to go away, but economically and socially, the country is drifting toward looser metropolitan and regional formations, anchored by the great cities and urban archipelagos that already lead global economic circuits."

Proponents of megaregions estimate that between now and 2050, more than two-thirds of the U.S. population growth and economic growth will occur in megaregions. A September 2005 Global Gateway Report, "The United States of America's 3rd Century Strategy: Preserving the American Dream" (Regional Plan Association, 2005), proposed:

> "As the number of economically competitive regions grows around the world, America's cities need to band together in order to strengthen their role in the global economy. ... As metropolitan regions in the United States grow together, many diseconomies have emerged, such as congestion in transportation networks which affect the economic vitality and quality of life of these regions. The megaregion model is based upon the idea that if the cities in these colliding regions work together they can create a new urban form that will increase economic opportunity and global competitiveness for each individual city and for the nation."

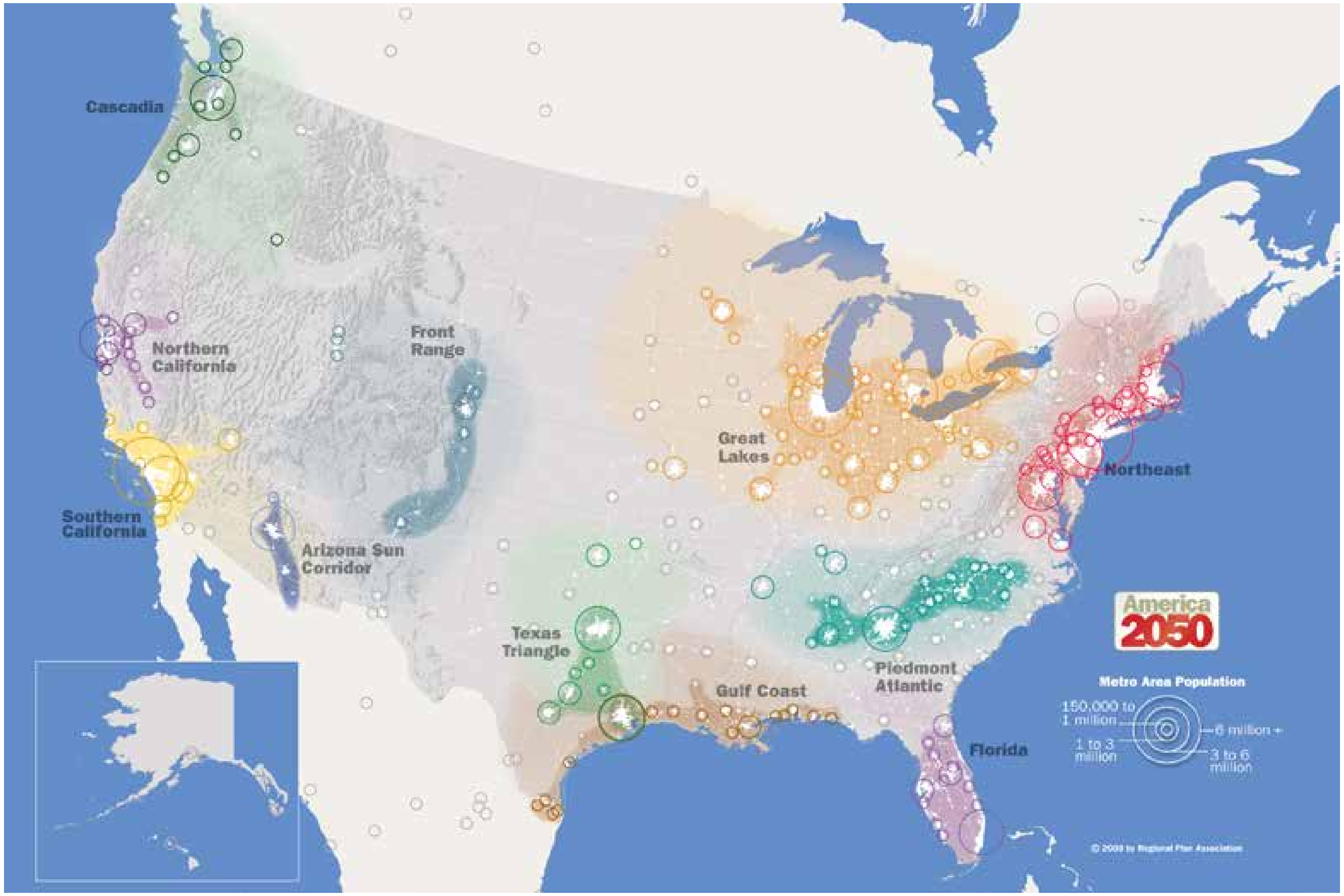
America 2050[7] has identified 10 megaregions expected to emerge over the next several decades. They are depicted in Figure 2 and include a huge northeastern megaregion that extends from Boston to Northern Virginia. **Note that the Richmond-Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News axis is not included on this list and Richmond's leadership appears to be more interested in pursuing connections with Northern Virginia than with Hampton Roads.**

6 www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-33.html.

7 America 2050 is the Regional Plan Association's national infrastructure planning and policy program, providing leadership on a broad range of transportation, sustainability and economic-development issues impacting America's growth in the 21st century.

FIGURE 2

AMERICA 2050'S EMERGING MEGAREGIONS



Source: www.America2050.org

Richmond And Hampton Roads: Are There Arguments For A Megaregion?

Practically speaking, regional and megaregional cooperation will occur only if citizens and leaders opt for collaboration rather than competition. This is much easier said than done. Candidates running for office in Fairfax County receive zero votes from residents of Loudoun County and so their political future is not tied to regionalism. The legendary Tip O'Neill, speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1977-1987, was substantially on target when he commented that, ultimately, "all politics is local."

Nevertheless, many modern governmental problems and their solutions overlap political boundaries and metropolitan regions. Transportation issues frequently exemplify this situation. If widening I-81 is a good idea (and few who travel it consistently would say otherwise), then multiple regions and states must be involved in planning such a development and pushing it to conclusion because the highway travels through dozens of counties and cities and several states. Political boundaries begin to blur in such situations.

Finding common ground is the key to any uncoerced agreement. The most attractive common ground for voters and elected officials is identifiable financial gains. This can come in the form of reduced costs or improved service. Prospective multiregion gains are possible (though hardly guaranteed) if cities, counties and regions cooperate not only on transportation projects, but also in areas such as sanitation and health, the environment, job training, cultural amenities, higher education and the ability to attract businesses large and small. A side benefit is that joint approaches often also generate the raw political clout that translates larger size and population into more favorable governmental treatment at the state and federal levels.

The notion that a megaregion approach to many issues would be advantageous is not a new one. Thomas R. Frantz, of the Williams Mullen law firm, was involved in discussions in the early 2000s with business leaders of Hampton Roads and Richmond concerning the possibility of merging the two metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) to create one megaregion from Hampton Roads to Richmond. Frantz wrote in the Richmond Times-Dispatch in June 2012:

> "As the competition to attract economic development becomes greater and more global, many localities are finding short-term financial incentives are not enough. A solid infrastructure, plentiful amenities and the ability for people and businesses to connect with one another and to the outside world must also be present. Cities that want to compete nationally and internationally are blurring boundaries, combining their assets and resources, and redefining themselves through alliances with other nearby cities to become more attractive."

In an article in Virginia Business magazine, Frantz explained further what he was proposing:

> "We're not talking about merging cities, counties, fire departments. We're not talking about combining governments or even merging economic development authorities. All we're talking about is to enhance the way we hold ourselves out to the world as a combined mid-Atlantic gateway."

A Richmond-based regional think tank, Richmond Future, led by former Virginia Commonwealth University president Eugene P. Trani, has researched the central Virginia region and assessed the future of the capital city and the surrounding area. While the group has not formally adopted a resolution supporting the megaregion approach, it did say the following in a report printed in the Richmond Times-Dispatch on Feb. 21, 2016:

> "The interests that our region shared with Hampton Roads around the Port of Richmond and Route 460 became far clearer to see, with some even envisioning the potential formation of a 'mega-region' in which the economic and transportation planning would enhance our common interests in a globally integrated economy."

The contributors to "Megaregions: Planning for Global Competitiveness" (Catherine Ross, ed., Island Press, 2009) concluded:

> "Megaregions offer flexible frameworks to harmonize transportation with quality of life, economic opportunity, and environmental sustainability. Megaregions are the infrastructure and economic footprint in the global economy. Megaregions provide a sustainable future through multi-scalar, cross-boundary solutions. Megaregions allow us to think globally, coordinate regionally and act locally."

This is grand rhetoric. Not yet demonstrated, however, are answers to two critical questions: (1) Can economic and political benefits really be realized by acting together, or are the differences between areas such as Hampton Roads and Richmond, or Richmond and Northern Virginia, so large that they cannot be overcome? (2) **If the benefits do exist, will the body politic, especially the Dillon Rule-protective General Assembly, permit cooperative megaregion behavior to develop and flourish?**

TABLE 1

COMPARING THE RICHMOND AND HAMPTON ROADS MSAS (2016)

Characteristic	Richmond MSA	Hampton Roads MSA
Square Miles of Land Area	4,576.3	2,682.9
Counties	13	5
Cities	4	9
Population	1,281,708	1,726,907
Education, High School Grad	90.0%	91.1%
Education, Bachelor's or Higher	36.7%	31.4%
Civilian Labor Force	669,033	831,056
Per Capita Personal Income*	$50,460	46,400
Personal Income*	$64,151,580,000	$80,033,527,000
Median Family Income*	$75,126	$70,597
Gross Domestic Product	$80,702,000,000	$92,827,000,000

*Most recent data from 2015 (U.S. Census)
Sources: Virginia Economic Development Partnership, Virginia Employment Commission, U.S. Census Bureau and Bureau of Economic Analysis

Are We On Our Way To A Richmond-Hampton Roads Megaregion?

Table 1 reveals that while the Richmond-area MSA is physically larger (4,576.3 square miles) than the Hampton Roads MSA (2,682.9 square miles), the population of the Hampton Roads region is larger (1,726,907 to 1,281,708). The greater density of the population in Hampton Roads is reflected in the transportation issues discussed subsequently. Likewise, the nominal gross domestic product of Hampton Roads exceeds that of Richmond ($92.8 billion compared to $80.7 billion).

What would be the economic size of a combined Richmond-Hampton Roads megaregion? Table 2 tells us that it would rank as the 20th-largest metropolitan economy in the country. Clearly, a metropolitan region of this size would be sufficient to attract a major airport and other transportation accouterments if, of course, the citizens of the new megaregion could agree upon its location.

Does the theoretical concept of a Richmond-Hampton Roads megaregion represent reality insofar as work patterns and connections are concerned? Not quite yet, as Figure 3 reveals. However, we can see in Table 4 that a substantial number of workers do make the trek between the two metropolitan areas. Of the top 10 out-of-metro cities and counties to which residents of Richmond commuted in 2014, five were in Hampton Roads: Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Newport News, James City County and Chesapeake, in that order of magnitude. This involved 20,834 workers. Additionally, of the top 10 out-of-metro locations from which Richmond workers commuted, five were in Hampton Roads: the cities of Virginia

Beach, Newport News, Norfolk, Chesapeake and Hampton, in that order. This flow involved 22,595 workers. The total "in and out" flow of workers in the Richmond metro constituted 6.49 percent of the labor force and the total flow in both directions was 43,429.

Of the top 10 out-of-metro cities and counties to which residents of Hampton Roads commuted in 2014, four were in the Richmond area: Henrico, Chesterfield and Hanover counties, and the city of Richmond. This flow involved 27,007 individuals. Of the top 10 out-of-metro sites from which workers in Hampton Roads commuted, three were in the Richmond area: Richmond and the counties of Chesterfield and Henrico. This flow involved 15,916 individuals and the total flow in both directions was 42,923.

To place these numbers in context, consider that in 2016, on average the size of the civilian labor force in the Richmond metropolitan area was 669,033. Hence, 43,429/669,033 = 6.49 percent of that labor force was traveling to or from Hampton Roads for work. Insofar as Hampton Roads was concerned, 42,923/831,056 = 6.57 percent of that labor force was traveling to or from Richmond for work.

If we consider Richmond and Hampton Roads as a unit, then in 2014, more than 86,000 workers commuted back and forth between Richmond and Hampton Roads. This does not a megaregion make, but does reveal that economic connections between the two regions are greater than some might suspect.

TABLE 2

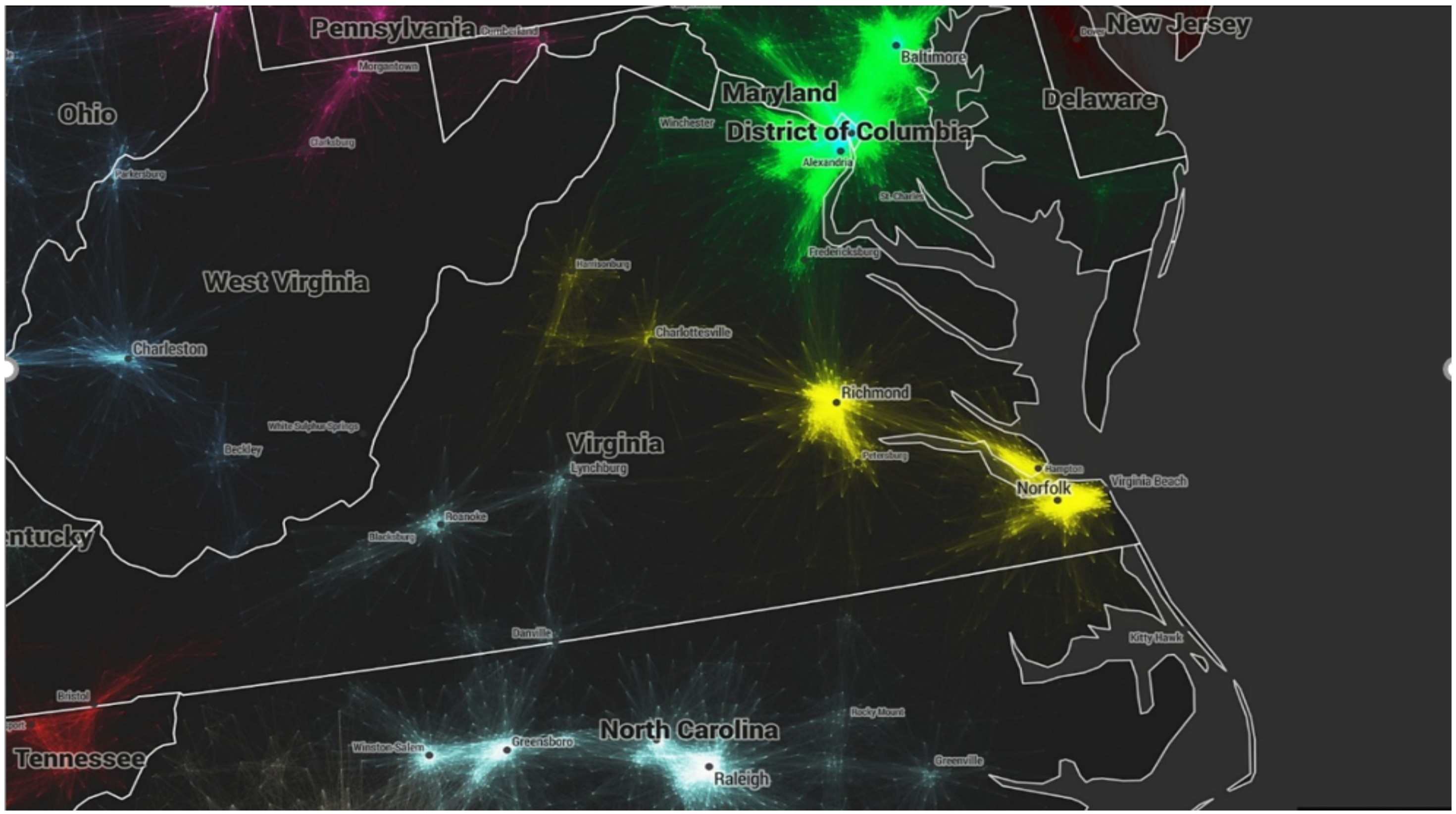
REAL GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCT (GRP) BY METROPOLITAN AREA, 2010 AND 2016 (CHAINED 2009 DOLLARS)

	GRP 2010	GRP 2016	Nat'l Metro Size Rank	GRP Growth Rate (2010-2016)
Baltimore MSA	150,990	164,545	19	8.98%
Charlotte MSA	115,827	140,815	21	21.57%
Cincinnati MSA	105,826	116,071	28	9.68%
Cleveland MSA	104,299	114,492	29	9.77%
Columbus MSA	94,257	114,492	30	21.47%
Denver MSA	151,224	180,446	18	19.32%
Phoenix MSA	178,640	203,253	16	13.78%
Portland MSA	141,374	151,817	20	12.42%
St. Louis MSA	134,051	140,712	22	4.97%
Hampton Roads MSA	81,132	81,363	39	0.28%
Richmond MSA	61,992	69,987	44	12.90%
RICH/HR Combined MSA	143,124	151,350	21	5.75%

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

FIGURE 3

COMMUTING PATTERNS IN VIRGINIA'S URBAN CRESCENT



Source: "An Economic Geography of the United States: From Commutes to Megaregions," by Garrett Dash Nelson and Alasdair Rae (Nov. 30, 2016), https://figshare.com/articles/United_States_Commutes_and_Megaregions_data_for_GIS/4110156

Nothing prevents the Richmond and Hampton Roads metropolitan areas from marketing themselves as a megaregion and then behaving accordingly – for example, developing a super-regional airport midway between the two population centers, promoting and accelerating the widening of I-64, supporting the development of the Port of Virginia (though centered in Hampton Roads, it has one location in Richmond), developing a cooperative approach to high-speed rail and cooperating on regional-friendly legislation such as GO Virginia.

The federal government's Office of Planning and Budget is responsible for designating megaregions; however, being designated as a megaregion (or claiming to be one) yields no automatic benefits. Federal programs focus on metropolitan regions such as the Richmond metropolitan region rather than megaregions. Ultimately, some minor prestige may attach to the label "megaregion," but no stream of federal funding is tied to that designation. Consequently, a megaregion is as a megaregion does. Cooperative, forward-looking behavior that recognizes interdependence and the need for jointly derived solutions is the operational key.

What would a megaregion beginning in Baltimore and bending south to Hampton Roads look like? Table 4 reports population and gross regional product data for the four major components of such a region. In terms of GRP, this megaregion would be the third largest in the country, trailing only Los Angeles and New York (see Graph 1). Once again, however, one must recognize that this designation would be meaningless unless it were accompanied by coordinated, collaborative behavior in critical areas, such as transportation. Given that such cooperation has proven to be difficult inside Virginia (for example, between Richmond and Hampton Roads), it is fair to predict that it would be at least as challenging to achieve consensus and cooperation across several states and the District of Columbia.

Taking the long view, however, there is little mystery concerning where the process of urbanization is leading us. If this chapter is rewritten 25 years from today, then we could expect it to report evidence showing the Richmond and Hampton Roads metropolitan areas touching each other along the I-64 corridor and the Washington, D.C., and Richmond metropolitan areas approaching, if not touching, each other. Given this likelihood, it would be silly not to give thought to what such a megaregion should look like in terms of its governance.

TABLE 3

OUT-OF-METRO COMMUTING PATTERNS: RICHMOND AND HAMPTON ROADS, 2014

Top 10 Out-of-Metro Places To Which Workers Commute Out-of-Region			
Richmond Metro		Hampton Roads Metro	
	Number of Workers		Number of Workers
Fairfax County	15,463	Fairfax County	12,647
Virginia Beach	5,942	Henrico County	11,128
Prince William County	4,222	Richmond	7,514
Newport News	4,085	Chesterfield County	5,879
Norfolk	4,022	Arlington County	3,814
Spotsylvania County	3,697	Prince William County	3,263
Chesapeake	3,618	Loudoun County	2,753
Loudoun County	3,265	Hanover County	2,486
James City County	3,167	Alexandria	1,896
Arlington County	2,832	Stafford County	1,430
Top 10 Out-of-Metro Places From Which Workers Come			
Richmond Metro		Hampton Roads Metro	
Fairfax County	8,592	Chesterfield County	6,668
Virginia Beach	7,504	Fairfax County	5,842
Prince William County	5,873	Henrico County	5,581
Loudoun County	4,639	Prince William County	4,348
Newport News	4,212	Currituck County, NC	3,910
Norfolk	4,059	Richmond	3,667
Chesapeake	3,780	Loudoun County	2,720
Spotsylvania County	3,356	Middlesex County	2,689
Hampton	3,040	Pasquotank County, NC	2,505
Albemarle County	2,357	Accomack County	2,450

Source: Virginia Employment Commission Origin-Destination Statistics, 2014

TABLE 4

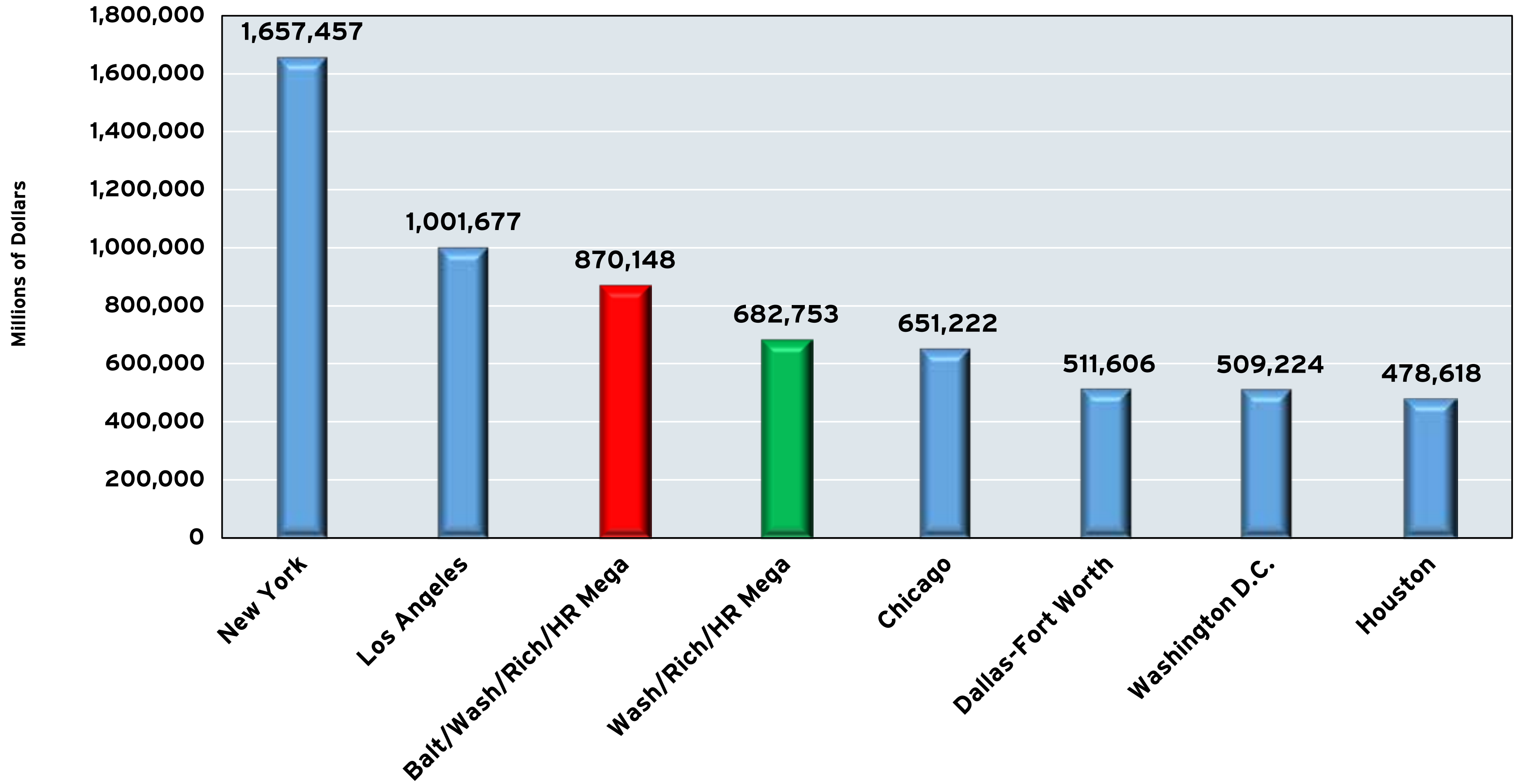
CHARACTERISTICS OF A MID-ATLANTIC MEGAREGION: BALTIMORE TO HAMPTON ROADS, 2016

	Gross Regional Product (GRP)	Population (Estimate)
Baltimore	$187,395,000,000	2,798,886
Hampton Roads	$92,827,000,000	1,726,907
Richmond	$80,702,000,000	1,281,708
Washington, D.C.	$509,224,000,000	6,131,977
Totals	$870,148,000,000	11,939,478

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau for population and Bureau of Economic Analysis for GRP

GRAPH 1

GROSS REGIONAL PRODUCTS OF THE LARGEST METROPOLITAN REGIONS IN THE UNITED STATES AND A VIRGINIA URBAN CRESCENT MEGAREGION, 2015



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

Can We Learn From Others?

Aside from New York City, three outstanding examples of regional government in the United States are Portland, Minneapolis-St. Paul and Indianapolis. We will discuss each briefly to give readers what could well be a taste of the future.

PORTLAND

Portland is the country's only MSA to have gone as far as establishing a general-purpose, regionally elected governing body. "Metro," as this elected government is known, serves more than 1.5 million people in a metropolitan area with a population of almost 2.4 million. Metro encompasses the city of Portland and 23 other cities. The cities and counties maintain their own local governments, but Metro provides regionwide planning and coordination to manage growth, infrastructure and development issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries. It does the transportation planning; manages 17,000 acres of parks, trails and natural areas; and operates attractions such as the Oregon Zoo, Oregon Convention Center, Portland Expo Center and Portland Center for the Arts. It plans and oversees the region's solid waste and recycling programs.

Portland is a medium-sized city – the nation's 25th-largest metro area in terms of population. Oft-referenced publications such as "Places Rated"[8] consistently assign it high rankings, citing its regional transit system, the walkability of its urban areas and its environmental consciousness, in addition to conventional amenities and many attractive job opportunities. Portland provides evidence that regions can flourish with a regional government as an overlay to local governments.

Even so, it should be noted that financial savings associated with Portland's particular model of regional government have never really been documented. Indeed, given the notably progressive political bent of the city of Portland's citizenry and leadership, regional government has turned out to be a vehicle for extending a high-tax, high-service model to a broader range of cities and towns than otherwise probably would have been the case.

8 www.bestplaces.net.

MINNEAPOLIS AND ST. PAUL

The twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul are distinct governmental units in Minnesota. Minneapolis (population 407,000) is the county seat of Hennepin County, which includes 44 other cities. St. Paul (population 297,000) is the county seat of Ramsey County. Together, the two cities usually are referred to as the Twin Cities – hence the name of their major league baseball team, the Minnesota Twins. The metropolitan region includes seven counties as well, and the metropolitan area population exceeds 3.28 million.

St. Paul maintains a unique neighborhood governance system whereby it is divided into 17 city districts, each of which has a council funded by the city, and exercises significant powers, especially on land-use issues. The overlay of the regional government structure of the Twin Cities metropolitan area is an almost 50-year-old Metropolitan Council whose members are appointed by the governor. The council deals with the region's public transportation, sewage treatment, regional and urban planning, housing, and parks and trails. The enabling state legislation provides that the Metropolitan Council shall "provide a framework for regional systems including aviation, transportation, parks and open spaces, water quality and water management."[9] The Metropolitan Council boasts that it offers a variety of public services at lower-unit costs than comparable cities, and there is some evidence in favor of this view.

INDIANAPOLIS

Indianapolis (population 858,000, but almost 2 million in the metropolitan area) has a complex form of governance known as "Unigov" that came about in 1970 when the city consolidated with the government of Marion County and 11 towns. While local governments maintain some of their own municipal services and identities, including police and schools, Unigov provides consolidated services not unlike Portland and the Twin Cities.

9 https://metrocouncil.org.

The Indianapolis experience is unique in that it has been the subject of a comprehensive study and evaluation: “40 Years after Unigov: Indianapolis and Marion County’s Experience with Consolidated Government” (Jeff Wachter, May 2014, Center for Government Research, www.cgr.org). Wachter concluded that “Unigov-impacted communities in Indianapolis are in a better position going forward – the economy is stronger, the tax base is broader, and the city’s reputation is greater.” Noting that some of the initial impact of Unigov may be declining, Wachter makes the important point that “the benefit of consolidation might not have been dependent on unified government as much as on a unified vision for the region’s future.”

Final Observations

The experience of Indianapolis underlines an important point: Cities and counties do not need to establish formal regional governmental structures to cooperate. More important are the attitudes of the participants and their willingness to collaborate.

Given the rapid pace of urbanization along the mid-Atlantic coast and the likely continued growth of the federal government, it is easy to forecast that in 25 years, Virginia’s urban crescent will constitute a continuous band of population and economic activity with no rural interruptions. A salient question is how this urban swath should be governed. Some regional and multiregional governmental solutions surely must be considered. Portland, the Twin Cities and Indianapolis provide some guidance in this regard.

Aside from natural tensions between localities arising from regional consolidation and political motivations, Virginia’s almost notorious status as a Dillon Rule state may prove to be the largest barrier to regionalization. Insofar as municipal sovereignty is concerned, compared to states across the country, localities within Virginia are significantly disadvantaged due to the Commonwealth’s long history of Dillon Rule jurisprudence and, perhaps most relevant to this discussion, the denial of several local governmental consolidations throughout the 20th century. In light of the fact that Indianapolis, the Twin Cities and Portland are not strictly subject to the same red tape as municipalities in Virginia, it would seem that any attempt at regionalization in the Commonwealth would necessitate one of two things: an imaginative solution similar to Unigov, where towns can consolidate services creatively while still maintaining enough separation to circumvent the Dillon Rule, or at minimum a reduction in how broadly Virginia applies the Dillon Rule to certain aspects of municipal sovereignty.

If notable Virginians such as Mr. Jefferson were in residence today, would they insist that Virginia governmental laws, structures and traditions, some of which date to before the American Revolution, be maintained, regardless of their relevance to today’s challenges or their cost effectiveness? We venture this observation: If these revered individuals were as astute and perceptive as history records, then transplanted to 2017, they would be supporters and advocates of innovative regional governance structures. They would wish to maintain local contact and control wherever plausible, but simultaneously encourage and implement regional solutions to challenges that no longer respect city and county boundaries.

APPENDIX A		
SUCCESSFUL CONSOLIDATIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN VIRGINIA		
Units of Government Involved	Name of Consolidated Government	Merger Effective Date
Richmond (city) Manchester (city)	City of Richmond	1910
Waynesboro (town) Basic City (town)	Town of Waynesboro	1923
Hampton (city) Phoebus (town) Elizabeth City (county)	City of Hampton	1952
Newport News (city) Warwick (county)	City of Newport News	1958
Virginia Beach (city) Princess Anne (county)	City of Virginia Beach	1963
South Norfolk (city) Norfolk (county)	City of Chesapeake	1963
Tazewell (town) North Tazewell (town)	Town of Tazewell	1963
Christiansburg (town) Cambria (town)	Town of Christiansburg	1964
Holland (town) Whaleyville (town) Nansemond (county)	City of Nansemond	1972
Suffolk (city) Nansemond (city)	City of Suffolk	1974

DEFEATED CONSOLIDATIONS		
Units of Government Involved	Proposed Name of Consolidated Government	Year of Rejection
Hampton (city) Newport News (city) Warwick (city)	City of Hampton Roads	1956
Richmond (city) Henrico (county)	City of Richmond	1961
Winchester (city) Frederick (county)	City of Winchester	1969
Roanoke (city) Roanoke (county)	Name of city to be determined by voters.	1969
Charlottesville (city) Albemarle (county)	Name of city to be determined by voters.	1970
Bristol (city) Washington (county)	Name of city to be determined by voters.	1971
Front Royal (town) Warren (county)	Front Royal - city or county form to be determined by voters.	1976
Pulaski (town) Dublin (town) Pulaski (county)	County of Pulaski	1983
Staunton (city) Augusta (county)	Consolidated County of Augusta and Tier City of Staunton	1984
Covington (city) Clifton Forge (city) Alleghany (county)	City of Alleghany Highlands	1987
Emporia (city) Greensville (county)	City of Emporia	1987
Roanoke (city) Roanoke (county)	Roanoke Metropolitan Government	1990
Clifton Forge (city) Alleghany (county)	City of Alleghany	1991
Bedford (city) Bedford (county)	City of Bedford and Shire of Bedford	1995
Source: Virginia Commission on Local Government		